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By-Wood, Robert E.

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The most important prerequisite to group creativity in curriculum development is a climate of free inquiry, free expression, and objective criticism. An atmosphere such as this develops from the personal security, active participation, and creativity of each team member. A period of negative feelings caused by frustration and failure when the individual educational philosophies of team members are criticized and torn apart is necessary to the eventual unification of the team; when the pieces are reassembled into a group philosophy, the team can create a new curriculum which will be a team product. (SP)

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TEAM teaching

WEBER SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Frustration, Turmoil and Discomfort In Team Teaching

By Robert E. Wood*

Both the demands and rewards of team teaching have been examined in great detail by many innovative educators. Nearly everyone in the least familiar with the philosophical foundations of this educational practice can present some superficial case for its adoption or rejection. There is, however, one aspect which seems to be ignored when the merits of team teaching are debated; it is particularly avoided by those people who advocate the adoption of a team approach. This aspect concerns creativity within the team: its composition, its appearance and its necessity. In no other educational situation is creativity so valuable and yet so easily accessible. Many team philosophies are so speedily formulated that creativity inadvertently goes unrecognized even though it appears to be the essence of the stimulus which causes team teaching to function.

Creativity is the prelude to a successful team relationship; it is also its end product. In an operable team situation, each member realizes his ideas, no matter how outlandish, will receive objective examination and inspection. Creativity results when this sense of personal security is firmly established. From this security springs the climate of free inquiry so essential to team teaching.

Perhaps the neglect of creativity as an important aspect of team teaching results from the fact that creativity within a team is born from so many negative situations: fumbling, frustration, and failure. A functioning team does not instantaneously come into existence. It is the product of many hours of turmoil and discomfort. There are times when any chance of establishing a team seems nonexistent. When a teacher's educational standards and practices are severely criticized for the first time, it can be a shattering experience. Frequently the criticism is personal at the outset; a greater probability is that the teacher has never been confronted so closely with people who disagree with him so emphatically. It is impossible to dismiss the criticism by merely ignoring the critic because both are in a situation where necessity demands they work together nearly every minute of the day.

Mr. Wood is Chairman of the Communicative Arts Department at Roy High School, Weber District, Ogden, Utah

The shattering is a necessary element of team unification. Only when the individual philosophy of each member is broken into pieces can the pieces be arranged in a manner that creates a group philosophy and establishes a satisfying working relationship.

It is important to realize at this time that no teacher loses a sense of individuality because of his philosophical destruction. Most educators considering a step in the team direction seem more concerned over this loss of individuality than any other item. A teacher will become a nonentity only if he desires to become one; if he desires such a fate, then he deserves it. A team that functions successfully demands active participation from each member; each member must be a contributor to realize the full effect. It also demands that every member state disagreement when he disagrees. On the other hand, it also demands individuals who can listen objectively and adjust disagreements accordingly.

When professional educators arrive at that time in team development where the necessary climate of inquiry and creativity exists, enabling them to plan a curriculum for the first time, it is a moment worth experiencing. All the frustration, all the fumbling, all the failure have widened the team's educational perspective. Progress has taken place. Every fumbling has added to a large pool of experience; every failure has widened the team's educational perspective; every near team disintegration has strengthened the working relationship; they have all fostered creativity. Each member is forced to think. No one wishes to become involved in an unenjoyable educational situation; consequently, he will make it impossible for such a situation to exist. He will employ his total creative effort to remedy an unacceptable situation. Before a curriculum is organized, every theoretical handicap has been explored and altered. Where possible without factual application, practical problems are eliminated.

It is essential that each team be allowed to experience a period of negativity. No person should try to eliminate such experiences. A team must learn to function through actual discovery; this is an integral part of team development. Certain guidelines for the introductory phases can be provided, but that is all. A team must involve itself in

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its own creation; therefore, it must be allowed to fumble for its own light switch. When the switch is found, the resulting light is dazzling.

Then, the idea appears which provides the direction for which the team has been seeking. In the atmosphere of free inquiry so painfully created, the idea is subjected to intense, creative examination: it does not diminish. As each member explores, he contributes a vital expansion of the original concept. The process continues, and the team stabilizes. Excitement replaces frustration; assurance overcomes fumbling; and success defeats failure. Each member has become actively involved with the idea, discovering his individual relationship to it. He wants to know where he will fit. The end result is a curriculum which is not the product of one individual, but the property of a team of individuals.

Eventually the idea has withstood criticism from every conceivable source: faculty, counselors, administration, and professional consultants. It is then ready for practical application.

When the new curriculum is applied for the first time, inevitably it will need revision. This is as it should be. The process of revision must never cease; the curriculum should constantly be undergoing renovation. A curriculum should have only direction, not an ultimate destination. The moment the destination is reached, creativity ends. Stagnation appears and the team will revert gradually to a traditional situation wherein a teacher has certain assigned and never-changing tasks. There is no professional feedback, only complacency. Complacency is anathema to team teaching.

It must be stressed that the standard by which renovation and innovation occur should be based upon what will most benefit the student's educational career. That which does not advance this objective should be immediately discarded, regardless of its theoretical brilliance.

Visitors have frequently asked, "What have you got to give us?" We can only reply that we have an attitude to share. We can let them experience the exciting atmosphere which exists when people become intensely involved in the work they are doing. We can provide guidelines which have proved useful to us; we can show them curriculums we have created, but we can not give them a team; in fact, we won't even attempt this. We only hope they can foresee, with us, the unlimited educational opportunities which exist when educators in team teaching combine inquiry with creativity.